



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1400 South 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718

5 February 2002

To: Governor's Office, Todd O'Hair, State Capitol, Room 204, P.O. Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801
Environmental Quality Council, State Capitol, Room 106, P.O. Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Metcalf Building, P.O. Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

Director's Office

Parks Division

Lands Section

FWP Commissioners

Fisheries Division

Legal Unit

Wildlife Division

Design & Construction

MT Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, P.O. Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202

MT State Parks Association, P.O. Box 699, Billings, MT 59103

MT State Library, 1515 E. Sixth Ave., P.O. Box 201800, Helena, MT 59620

James Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, P.O. Box 1184, Helena, MT 59624

Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624

George Ochenski, P.O. Box 689, Helena, MT 59624

Jerry DiMarco, P.O. Box 1571, Bozeman, MT 59771

Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624

Wayne Hurst, P.O. Box 728, Libby, MT 59923

Bob Raney, 112 S. 6th St., Livingston, MT 59047

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Attached is the decision notice for the Meadow Lake Fishing Access Site (FAS) Improvement Proposal Environmental Assessment (EA). FWP proposed to cooperate with PPL Montana to improve facilities for overnight camping and day use at this FAS located on Ennis Lake. Two public comments were received on the proposal. The public comment period ended on January 24, 2003.

It is my decision to proceed with the proposed improvements at the Meadow Lake Fishing Access Site. These improvements include road work, barriers, day-use parking, campsites, camping spurs, latrine relocation, picnic tables, campfire rings, signing, and self-pay camping fee station. The parking area, latrine with pathway, and one campsite will be constructed to a disabled-accessible standard. In addition, portions of the existing road system and other disturbed areas will be reclaimed and reseeded with native grass. Further details are listed in the decision notice.

Questions regarding this decision notice should be directed to me at MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region Three, 1400 South 19th Avenue, Bozeman, MT 59718, (406) 994-4042, or at pflowers@montana.edu.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Partick J. Flowers
Regional Supervisor

Attachment

*Madison
Misc.*



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

MEADOW LAKE FISHING ACCESS SITE IMPROVEMENTS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region Three, Bozeman
February 5, 2003**

Proposed Action

FWP proposes to cooperate with PPL Montana in the design, development, funding, and management of a campground at Meadow Lake FAS in accordance with a hydroelectric re-licensing agreement and the Comprehensive Recreation Management Plan developed in conjunction with Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) re-licensing process. The primary purpose of this project is to help protect, mitigate, and enhance the recreational resources, particularly the camping opportunities, in the Ennis Lake area. Specifically, the following improvements are proposed:

- establish one gravel entrance road; block and reclaim existing entrance at northwest side of property;
- improve interior roads using a cul-de-sac end and rock road barriers to protect the site;
- reclaim sections of existing two-track road not utilized in new improvements;
- construct nine (9) camp spurs at edge of riparian growth including one site to accommodate campers with disabilities;
- establish six (6) designated day use parking stalls, including accessible facilities;
- relocate the existing sealed vault latrine closer to the center of the site;
- install picnic tables and fire rings at each camp spur and several for day use;
- install interior regulatory and interpretive signs; and,
- install self-pay fee station for overnight camping.

Montana Environmental Policy Act

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) assesses impacts of its proposals to the human and natural environments. The Meadow Lake Fishing Access Site (FAS) improvements and their effects were disclosed in the December 20, 2002 Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) to comply with the requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA).

A 30-day comment period was open from December 23, 2002 through January 24, 2003. Public notification of the proposed action was facilitated with the distribution of legal notices printed in The Madisonian (Ennis), Bozeman Daily Chronicle, and Helena Independent Record newspapers. In addition, the EA was posted on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.state.mt.us>.

Summary of Public Comment

Two public comments were received on the proposal. Both were opposed to the proposal, although on different grounds.

The first commenter opposed the improvements based on the state of the Ennis Lake fishery. The statement was made that, "Ennis Lake is in trouble as a fishery." It was suggested that a variety of sites on the Madison (Eight Mile Ford, Storey Ditch, and Windy Point), Big Hole (Pennington and High Bridge) and Jefferson rivers (Substation), "get the traffic and they are currently poor at best."

The second commenter was concerned about the future maintenance costs of the proposed improvements and the potential impact of these costs on user fees. The following statement was made: "Build nice places that we know will cost more to maintain in the future and worry about it then, when we can say how short of money we (FWP) are, and we need more. So – higher fees?"

Response To Public Comments

Ennis Lake is a self-sustaining wild trout fishery, with populations of Arctic grayling, rainbow trout, brown trout, and mountain whitefish. While 2001 gill net surveys indicated low catch rates of rainbow trout and Arctic grayling, catch rates of brown trout were similar to long-term averages at nearby Hebgen Lake (Clancey 2002, Byorth 2002). In 2001, 5,547 angler days were exerted at Ennis Lake according to the Montana Statewide Angling Survey (McFarland and Meredith 2002). Ennis Lake ranks 25th in overall fishing pressure in Region 3. Angler satisfaction rates at Ennis Lake were slightly lower than Hebgen Reservoir in 2001, but were higher than Willow Creek Reservoir, approximately 15 miles north of Ennis Lake. Due to the shallow nature of the reservoir, angling is localized and seasonal with roughly half of the angling pressure during the winter season. Fly-fishing is popular as weed beds develop on the shallow south end of the reservoir during mid-summer. While Ennis Lake does not support the angling pressure of renowned blue ribbon trout streams, it is a locally unique and popular sport fishery.

As explained in the narrative summary of the proposal (page 3 & 4 of the EA), PPL is providing the bulk of the funding for this project. The primary purpose of this

project is to help protect, mitigate, and enhance recreational resources, **particularly the camping opportunities**, in the Ennis Lake area. This funding is available only to enhance the Meadow Lake Fishing Access Site and cannot be shifted to other FAS's on other area rivers such as the Madison, Big Hole, or Jefferson rivers, as suggested by a commenter. The FWP contribution to the project will ensure that at least \$90,000 is deposited in the Long-Term Trust Fund to provide funding for future enhancements and improvements within the Madison-Missouri corridor covered by the FERC license (see page 15, comment 10e, in the EA).

Regarding future maintenance, PPL will provide maintenance funding to supplement FWP operations dollars to maintain the Meadow Lake FAS. FWP acknowledges that camping fees are necessary to maintain and operate fishing access sites.

Final Environmental Assessment for the Meadow Lake Fishing Access Site Improvement Proposal

The Draft EA and this Decision Notice will serve as the final document.

Decision

Based on the information in the Draft EA, it is my decision to proceed with the proposed action, namely improving the facilities at Meadow Lake FAS as described in the EA. These improvements include road work, barriers, day-use parking, campsites, camping spurs, latrine relocation, picnic tables, campfire rings, signing, and self-pay camping fee station. The parking area, latrine with pathway, and one campsite will be constructed to a disabled-accessible standard. In addition, portions of the existing road system and other disturbed areas will be reclaimed and reseeded with native grass.

Based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment and the applicable laws, regulations, and policies, I have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the natural or human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

If you have questions regarding this decision notice, please contact Pat Flowers, Region Three Supervisor at (406) 994-4042, 1400 S. 19th Avenue, Bozeman, MT 59718, or at pflowers@montana.edu.



Patrick J. Flowers
Regional Supervisor